

VZCZCXRO4604
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHTRO
DE RUEHYN #1937/01 2931259
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 201259Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3054
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001937

NOFORN
SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFAT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2019
TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: COULD A SA'ADA CEASEFIRE BE ON THE HORIZON?

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY. Rumors of Abdul-Malik al-Houthi's arrest, a flurry of high-level ROYG visits to Saudi Arabia, Foreign Minister Qirbi's sudden dispatch to Egypt, Syria, and Libya, and Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki's postponed visit to Sana'a point to the possibility of significant developments in the war in northern Yemen. It may be that a ceasefire and a return to mediation are in the works. It is also possible that Saudi Arabia is putting pressure on the ROYG to end the war in Sa'ada in order to focus efforts on eliminating the growing threat from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).
END SUMMARY.

ABDUL-MALIK REPORTEDLY IN CUSTODY

12. (S/NF) On the morning of October 18, Yemeni news media reported that Abdul-Malik al-Houthi had been taken into custody the day before. News Yemen, Yemen Observer, and Marib Press reported that the Houthi leader was arrested on October 17 after being injured during an airstrike that targeted Ketaf district (Sa'ada governorate). The Houthis' website, Al-Minbar.com, called these reports "a big lie." The official media also denies that Houthi is in custody. A DATT source in the Directorate of Military Intelligence was skeptical when asked about the reports. Conversely, according to another DAO source, Houthi is indeed injured and was taken to the Presidential Palace in Sana'a on October 19. He is reportedly receiving treatment at the presidential hospital in the new Ministry of Defense (MOD) complex (al-Ordi). Marib Press reported on October 20 that Houthi was admitted to the Sana'a military hospital to treat shrapnel wounds in his legs.

OFFICIAL VISITS TO SAUDI ARABIA

13. (C) On October 18, Deputy Prime Minister Rashad al-Alimi traveled to Riyadh to deliver a letter from President Saleh to King Abdullah and Prince Mohammed bin Nayif. Later that evening, in an interview on MBC TV, President Saleh said that the military mission in Sa'ada would be accomplished "within days." He added, "We are determined to crush terrorists and rebels in Sa'ada and this war will be the last one." The following day, MOD Chief of Staff Major General Ahmed al-Ashwal and Minister of Interior Mohtaher Rashad al-Masri unexpectedly traveled to Riyadh for meetings, cancelling appointments in Sana'a at the last moment. (Comment: While the content of ROYG officials' discussions with KSA counterparts is unknown, it likely included the Sa'ada war and the October 13 shooting and arrest of AQAP militants who had crossed into Saudi Arabia from Yemen after they were stopped by a female guard at a police checkpoint. Their car contained four explosive belts and automatic weapons, and it

is believed they were planning a major attack in Saudi Arabia with six Yemeni accomplices. End Comment.) Meanwhile, the visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, originally scheduled for October 19, was postponed one week due to President Saleh's "current concerns." On October 20, Foreign Minister al-Qirbi began a trip to Egypt, Syria, and Libya to deliver letters from President Saleh updating the presidents of those nations on developments in Yemen.

COMMENT

14. (S) These developments may prove to be nothing more than rumor and coincidences. The news stories reporting on Abdul-Malik al-Houthi's arrest cite only unnamed security sources. If Houthi is indeed in custody, however, it may provide an opportunity for the two parties to reach a ceasefire agreement. Both the ROYG and the Houthis appear exhausted after more than two months of intense fighting. Despite both parties' claims of major battlefield gains -) claims that cannot be independently verified -) a decisive military victory appears out of reach for either side. (Note: Recently the ROYG has been reporting hundreds of Houthi battlefield deaths, a major increase over the dozens usually reported in the official media, but one that is impossible to verify. Yet the Houthis continue to show signs of strength, as indicated by their reported October 19 takeover of the strategic Razzeh airfield. End Note.) However, the Houthi leader's alleged arrest may not translate into an effective ceasefire, as he is not believed to have much control over the approximately 5,000 loosely organized Houthi fighters -- and countless anti-government tribal

SANAA 00001937 002 OF 002

fighters who support them -- scattered across the mountains of Sa'ada and Amran governorates.

15. (S) COMMENT CONTINUED. It is also possible that the Saudis, fed up because the war against the Houthis is distracting the ROYG from the AQAP threat, are putting pressure on the ROYG to stop the fighting. A ceasefire would be a welcome development, but would not signal the end of the government's need to focus on the north. President Saleh's promise to the contrary, unless the ROYG undertakes serious efforts to rebuild the shattered governorate and provide its residents with greater economic opportunity, political participation, and respect for religious freedom, the chances of it being "the last war" are slim. END COMMENT.
BRYAN